

Royal Botanic Gardens
Kew

Inspiring futures



Sonia Dhanda

Tell us about your job

I am a Scientific Officer – CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species). I provide scientific advice on CITES and EU Wildlife Trade Regulations to Defra and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) on policy and licensing. I also undertake the research required to support this role. I provide training on CITES to Kew staff to ensure awareness of legal requirements in relation to collections, fieldwork and research.

Why is science important in your career?

I use science-based evidence to inform policy decisions. Strong research skills are required to be able to find all the information and data you can within a given time-frame and from that being able to confidently make policy decisions.

What is your average work day like?

I like the variety in my job role. A typical day for me can involve anything from providing scientific advice, reading and gathering evidence to form policy briefings, attending policy meetings and engaging with stakeholders, conducting research on species biology and trade, liaising with other scientific experts and developing outreach materials to disseminate policy information.

Did you go to university? If so, what did you study? If not, what did you do after leaving school?

Yes, I completed a BSc in Biology and then I worked for 4 years before undertaking my MSc in Conservation Science. Taking time off between further education and developing my work experience was important to me as I wanted to be sure about what I specialised in.

What sort of personality traits do you have that help you in your career?

Being organised, being a creative thinker to help with problem solving and for communicating ideas to different audiences, paying attention to detail and being a confident and clear communicator, both verbally and written.

What helped you get your role at Kew?

I would say the main factor which helped was my MSc in Conservation Science. I spent two weeks during my MSc at Kew, which involved one week of taught classes and a one-week group project. I continued the work of the group project as a volunteer in the summer and this equipped me with the skills required for my first job at Kew.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career like yours?

If you have a passion for science policy, I would speak to people working in the sector and understand the breadth of policy, from policy processes to national and international legislation and where you would like to have an influence. It's worthwhile taking an interest in the government's agenda and priorities.

Practise your communication skills, verbal and written, to be able to engage with a variety of audiences; policy needs to be conveyed to both technical and non-technical audiences. Develop your analytical and decision-making abilities. There are many online resources, books and courses on policy – it is useful to either have strong knowledge of a topic or be able to use your scientific research skills to bring together evidence to answer policy questions.

What do you want people to know about your work?

Plants are the greatest traded wildlife commodity globally.

Kew is the UK CITES Scientific Authority for Plants. We have a formal role in implementing the convention with the UK Government.

There are many important international frameworks and conventions that aim to protect and conserve nature, both nationally and internationally.

Want a career that grows?

Build your skills in science, technology, engineering, art and maths to give yourself a chance to blossom in a career like one of these varied and exciting jobs at Kew.

You could make a real difference to the world.

For further information: www.kew.org